



Press Release

2 January 2025

Council launches public consultation on draft Budget and Business Plan amid significant financial challenges

Residents are being asked for their views on Fenland District Council's draft Budget and Business Plan to help inform the "difficult choices" it faces.

For six consecutive years there has been no rise in Fenland's portion of the council tax – with 2023/24 even seeing a 2% cut in its element – as councillors reaffirmed their ongoing commitment to supporting local households.

The draft budget for 2025/26 is currently proposing a seventh year of no rise in Fenland's council tax. However, current forecasts based on that proposal show a deficit of £2.6million, due to less funding from central government, soaring costs and increased demand.

A [budget report before Cabinet last month](#) said the projected shortfall was "significantly higher" than previously forecast and represents "significant challenges" for the Council.

Cllr Chris Boden, Leader of Fenland District Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance, said: "For several years, we have been in the rare position in local government to not raise council tax thanks to careful planning and a continued focus on efficiency. We have been clear that raising council tax over the medium term to 2029/30 will be a last resort.

"However, like local authorities across the country, we are experiencing significant budget challenges due to less funding from central government, as well as increased costs and increased demand. Many councils will just raise the council tax by the maximum and then start to examine how they'll save money. We do it the other way round; we start by looking at how we can save money and reduce costs and only if we absolutely have to, will we consider looking at council tax."

"We are faced with having to make very difficult choices and not raising council tax is quite possibly not going to be realistic," he added. "We may well find ourselves forced to make a choice between unpalatable changes or increasing council tax."

The report said the proposed budget for 2025/26 is set against significant economic uncertainty and ongoing cost of living pressures, together with considerable uncertainty surrounding new government legislation and reforms:

- 'Simpler Recycling' legislation, which comes into force on 31 March 2025 for most businesses and non-domestic premises

- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation for packaging, which comes into force in October 2025
- Ongoing local government funding reforms
- Future devolution arrangements under the English Devolution White Paper

The report also shows that trading accounts and the cost of Internal Drainage Board levies (the funding paid to boards responsible for managing water levels and reducing flood risk) continue to be a burden on the Council's finances, and homelessness costs continue to be significantly above the budgeted figure.

However, it said significant savings are expected from the Council's ongoing Transformation programme, which is delivering measurable efficiency improvements across all services, and the outcome of its Accommodation Review. The Council is looking into the possibility of moving its headquarters at Fenland Hall in March to nearby Hereward Hall, as part of a review of office space that could bring long-term savings.

The Council will be required to put forward proposals of how it intends to meet the projected £2.6million shortfall before the final Budget is set in February 2025.

Also in next year's Budget, and reflected in the draft Business Plan priorities, is a proposed capital investment programme of £8.8million for a pipeline of projects across the district. This includes continued improvements to leisure centres, delivery of support outlined in the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, to improve services and reduce homelessness costs long-term, and new housing developments via the Council's investment subsidiary, Fenland Future Ltd.

The draft Business Plan, which sets out the Council's priorities for the year ahead, outlines four core priorities – Communities, Environment, Economy and Quality Organisation, with Transformation being the fifth cross-cutting priority.

Developed to meet the needs of local communities, the priorities focus on improving services and achieving meaningful outcomes, and also serve as clear measures of success by which the Council can be held accountable.

They include providing timely and effective support for our most vulnerable residents, delivering a high performing refuse, recycling and street cleansing service, investment in much-loved community events; preventing and tackling homelessness; helping people to live in good quality, safe housing; working with police to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour; encouraging residents to live healthier, more active lifestyles; lobbying for infrastructure improvements, improving air quality and much more.

Have your say!

The Council is now consulting on its proposed draft Budget and Business Plan, and encouraging residents, businesses and organisations to have their say.

To read both documents and share your views, visit: www.fenland.gov.uk/yourviews2025

The consultation is open between **Thursday 2 January** and **Sunday 2 February**.

Your feedback will help inform the proposed Budget and Business Plan before they are considered by Cabinet on 24 February 2025.

Paper copies of the documents and consultation will also be available to view, without an appointment, at the Council's Customer Services Centres at:

- South Fens Business Centre, Fenton Way, Chatteris, PE16 6TT
- Fenland Hall, County Road, March, PE15 8NQ
- The Boathouse Business Centre, Harbour Square, Nene Parade, Wisbech, PE13 3BH

Paper copies are also available on request by phoning the Council's Contact Centre on 01354 654321.

Ends

Notes to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact the Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226 or email: communications@fenland.gov.uk